

Elymian language

Elymian is the extinct language of the ancient Elymian people of western Sicily. Its characteristics are little known because of the extremely limited and fragmentary nature of the surviving texts.

The origins of Elymian and its relationships with other languages are unclear. It is widely believed to have been part of the Indo-European language family, but even that is uncertain. Within the Indo-European languages, it has been speculated that Elymian was related to either the Italic languages or the Anatolian languages (such as Hittite), although both theories are disputed.

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Elymian	
Region	Sicily
Extinct	3rd century BC?
Language family	Unclassified ^[1] (Indo-European?) <div>▪</div>
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	xly
Linguist List	xly (http://multitree.org/codes/xly)
Glottolog	elym1237 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/elym1237) ^[2]

Characteristics

Only a handful of Elymian texts have survived, dating from between the 6th and 4th centuries BC. These comprise a few proper names recorded by non-Elymian sources; inscriptions in Greek alphabet on several coins, which include the names of Elymian cities; and inscriptions in Greek alphabet on about 170 fragments of pottery (found mostly in a votive deposit at the ruined Elymian city of Segesta). These texts have been identified as Elymian, based on their evidently non-Hellenic characteristics, location and age.

The majority of textual artefacts are very short and fragmentary, comprising only a few letters. A small number of longer texts apparently contain a personal name and may have been dedicatory epigraphs. They sometimes appear to resemble Hellenic dedicatory epigraphs, in which an anthroponym in genitive form is followed by a verb literally meaning "I am" in order to convey "belonging".

A vase found at Montedoro, around 15 km southwest of Palermo, features one of the few complete inscriptions in Elymian. It has been tentatively translated to read "I [the pot] am [a gift] of Ata Tuka", or "I am [a gift] of Ata of [= son of] Tuka".^[3]

Classification

Proposed classifications the Elymian language can be summarized under two main positions, both of which relate it to Indo-European languages.

Some historical linguists agree that some peculiarities of that language – like non-alphabetic symbols engraved on some dedicatory fragments of pots, and genitive in *-ai* found in almost all the complete sequences – are suggestive of a connection to the Anatolian languages, and in particular, to Hittite. Other

historical linguists classify Elymian as related to the Italic languages on the basis of other possible features.

Any resolution of the question of affiliation appears to rely on further archaeological investigations at Elymian settlements in western Sicily.

Footnotes

1. <https://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/elym1237>
2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Elymian" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/elym1237>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
3. Luciano Agostiniani (1977). *Iscrizioni anelleniche di Sicilia: le iscrizioni elime* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=C9MD5bfFBD8C>). L. S. Olschki.

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